

COYOTE BEHAVIOR & PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE



**By becoming aware of coyote behavior and needs,
you can become part of the solution to make coexistence work.**

Coexistence means sharing the environment amicably. Peaceful coexistence entails a constant process. At our homes, it means not leaving out food that will entice coyotes into our yards or our garbage, and not leaving pets unattended. In the parks, it means not threatening coyotes by getting too close, or making them uncomfortable because of excessive dog activity.

Think of the situation with cars: If a dog is allowed to run unstrained into the street, he could be hurt. The solution is restraining our dogs when coyotes are out and about, keeping dogs and coyotes from communicating visually or through body language by moving on, and keeping our dogs calm.

We can't control the behavior of coyotes, but we can minimize their instinct to react to our dogs. Almost all coyote behavior toward dogs is a reaction to dog behavior, from being chased, to antagonistic communication, to territorial invasion. Coyotes don't tolerate interloper coyotes. Although they might benignly allow a mellow fellow to pass through their areas, all coyotes with more than a little bit of energy (and little if any respect) are seen as possible threats to resident coyotes. Dogs may be seen as interloper coyotes – they should pass through uneventfully and calmly.

Coexistence entails keeping coyotes as naturally wild as possible. Of course, coyotes will get used to dogs and humans in an urban park setting, but the goal is to minimize any interaction between them. NEVER feed or attempt to tame a coyote, and, if possible, keep your dogs from interacting on all levels with coyotes by keeping your distance and a sense of removal – this can be done by restraining our dogs, and moving on.

Be aware of these observed coyote behaviors in San Francisco parks:

- When chased, coyotes, especially the alpha coyotes, become upset and may chase back, bark, or even nip to move the dog away and warn it.
- Coyotes remember every chase incident and are prepared the next time, more ready to defend.
- Coyotes like it calm in their territories; it's best to move active dog play elsewhere.
- Coyotes enjoy “watching” dogs being walked; they have a need to know what is going on.
- Visual communication and body language can sometimes be antagonistic between dogs and coyotes– this is why we need to keep distance between the two by restraining dogs and moving on.
- During pupping season, beginning in about March, coyotes become especially protective.

Maybe you have come across a coyote that seems friendly. Your dog and the coyote wag tails and sniff each other at both ends – all seems pleasant and safe and happy. However, you need to know that every coyote reacts differently – and you will not know until after the fact. Alpha coyotes will be protective, not only of themselves but also of other members of their packs. They could run to the defense of this friendly pack member. This is why it is best to follow the guidelines, even if your personal experience suggests otherwise.

Injured animals may behave aggressively. Please report injured animals to your Animal Care & Control Dept.

[Janet Kessler has been documenting coyote behavior since 2007. This article appeared in a number of publications in 2010]